The Golden Rule in Business

by C. F. Dole

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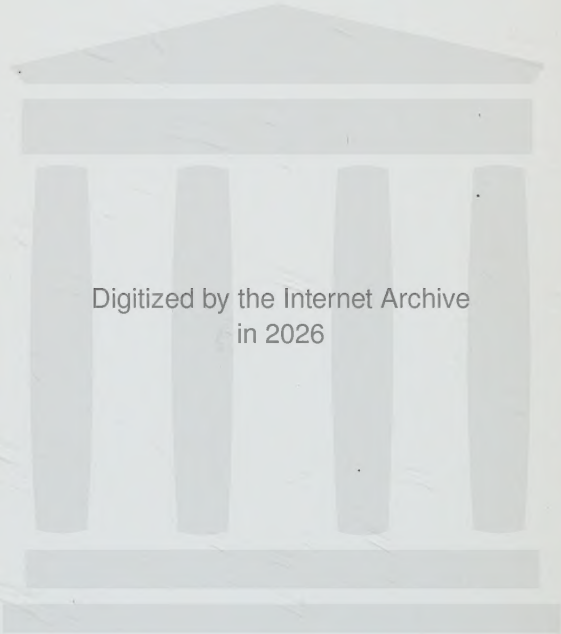

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The Golden Rule

In Business

BY

CHARLES F. DOLE

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THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO MY GOOD FRIEND,

BISHOP J. H. VINCENT,

IN EARNEST SYMPATHY

WITH HIS WISH FOR THE GROWTH

OF A STRONGER FAITH

IN PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION.

IT IS well known that students may pursue the principles of bookkeeping or navigation and yet not know how to apply these principles to keeping a set of books or sailing a ship. There is a growing suspicion that the fine teachings of our Sunday-schools likewise fail to make valid connection with practical life. Young people are taught to recite the Beatitudes or to tell the story of Jesus, without being made to think what these magnificent ideas and this splendid example have to do with ordinary buying and selling, or with voting, on occasion, against the unworthy candidates of one's own party.

Theory and practice.

This booklet is prepared with the purpose of showing what our Christianity has to do with the familiar practices of business. It is written in the conviction of the most impressive fact that has ever dawned upon the mind of man. This fact is, that *we live in a divine universe.* It is a realm of beneficent law, extending to

The moral universe.

every particle of matter and to every event and moment of life. Every intelligent person knows that, so far as visible and material things go, we cannot break a law with impunity. We cannot break the laws of construction with walls and bridges, and not come to grief. There is no chance in all the outward world to cheat or evade, and not sooner or later be caught. The whole visible world, however, is only a vast system of parables, illustrations, and object lessons of the vaster world of thought—the moral and spiritual world—to which men belong.

The sway of the Golden Rule.

I am persuaded that the rule of the moral law is no less rigorous than the law of gravitation. If justice is good for any men it is good for all; if it is the duty of any it is the duty of all; it is universal; it is inexorable; you cannot violate it. If the Golden Rule is the rule of a Christ, it is the rule of all men. If it holds good in heaven, or in any shining sphere, it holds good in this earth here and now. If physical laws, obeyed, keep our homes and our bodies safe, so this law only more surely keeps our lives safe, and constitutes the health of human society. As there is no law of things that men can afford to be ig-

norant of or to discredit, so they cannot afford to doubt this master law of the moral life. This would not be a divine universe if the Golden Rule did not accurately apply in this earth where we live. The Golden Rule goes with our belief in the good God. It is idle to talk of the one if we doubt the other. The following pages are designed to show how this is so and that it cannot be otherwise.

The Golden Rule in Business.

I.

THE GOLDEN RULE: WHAT IT MEANS.

EVERY one knows what the Golden Rule says: Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. The Good Master quotes it from the Old Testament. The Chinese have the same in another form: What you would not wish done to yourself do not to others. We do not know what man in the distant past first announced this rule. What we do know is that Jesus put new life and reality into it. He made it the law of his own beautiful life, and, since he uttered it, there has never failed from the earth a line of noble and generous men and women who have actually tried to put this rule into practice.

What the rule says.

As soon as we stop to think about the Golden Rule, and especially when we begin to apply it to the conduct of business, it does

not look so plain as it seems when read by the minister in church. Suppose a child asks what he would wish to have others do unto him? If he is foolish, he would like to be flattered and indulged; if he is lazy, he would like to be excused from his task; if he is selfish, he would like to be given more than his share of dainties. The tramp wishes gifts; the criminal would like to be let out of jail. The buyer, too, wishes the lowest possible price, as the seller desires the highest. How much should you give the man who brings provisions to your door? Are you to give what you would wish, if you had caught the fish, cut the wood, or hoed the potatoes? It is evident that here, as everywhere else in this complicated human life, there is need not merely of obedient intent, but of intelligence, judgment, common sense, and the knowledge of the facts of each case.

Certain puzzling questions.

Moreover the Golden Rule happens to be found among a group of very hard and radical sayings. The famous Sermon on the Mount calls the meek, the mourners, and the persecuted, blessed; it bids men use no oaths; it counsels non-resistance; it commands us to love

How men explain away the Golden Rule.

our enemies. Surely, men say, Jesus cannot expect to be taken seriously in these teachings. They are "Counsels of perfection"; they are heavenly ideals, in other words, impossible for men who live in the real world. You accordingly have at last a new version of the difficult old rule. It is said, "Do unto others as you would expect them to do unto you," wherein the beauty of the magnificent rule has dismally evaporated.

The truth is that Jesus' teachings cannot be read, or interpreted, or applied, like a legislative code. The characteristic of his teaching is not in its form, but in its spirit. The Golden Rule, like the other great passages with which it is grouped, is the effort to express in words what is more than words or acts, namely, a new spiritual attitude or temper. Herein is Jesus' originality. Whatever you do, he teaches, treat men as friends, show yourself friendly, hold men as brothers, meet them on the street, buy and sell with them in the friendly temper. Jesus' idea is too large to be fixed in any single form of expression. It is summed up in the splendid figure of the sun, pouring its light upon the evil and the good. So, says Jesus, is the love of God.

The spirit of Jesus; a new interpretation.

Be ye therefore the children of God, pouring out your lives in loving good-will, like the Father. This interpretation of the Golden Rule relieves us of the difficulties in applying it, made by a narrow literalism. The question is no longer, what my customer, my workman, the beggar, or the foolish child strictly would wish, or what I would wish in his place. The larger question is, What is the best that I can do, in each set of circumstances, *as a friendly man*, who aims to give his life, after Jesus' fashion and spirit, to the welfare of his brothers? It may be pure friendliness that sends the thief to jail, that refuses the tramp, that imposes difficult tasks on the child, that pays the baker and fisherman neither more nor less than the customary or market price. The law of friendly action —of love—aiming at the highest good of all, as it must be above the whims of the foolish or selfish, so it is above the mere wish of any individual, however kind-hearted. This will need fuller illustration as we go on.

II.

IS THE GOLDEN RULE PRACTICABLE FOR THIS WORLD?

WE ARE ready to show that the Golden Rule is no idle "Counsel of perfection," no mere theory or imaginary ideal, but the highest actual law of human life here and now. There is fortunately one great realm of life, where no one can doubt what we are saying. It is the home. So far is the Golden Rule from being impracticable in the realm of the home, that nothing else will serve to hold a home together. Where selfishness is, where self-indulgence pushes to the front, where there is scrambling and quarreling, in that hour or day when the Golden Rule lapses, the home is spoiled. The home begins as soon as a single life in the family group gives itself in love for the welfare of the others. The home is a success, a joy to enter, and a place of rest to stay in, where all the members down to the young children breathe the atmosphere of thoughtful helpfulness. Better the tiniest

What all men admit.

house, where by the natural conditions of daily service the law of love has constant exercise, than the most sumptuous mansion, whose inmates, being waited upon by a retinue of servants, forget the cardinal idea of the home. It is "not to be ministered unto but to minister." For the love which cements the family together grows strong, not by getting much, but by giving and doing, in the spirit of Him who said, "It is more blessed [that is, happy] to give than to receive."

We have also, in the plain facts of the home life, ready answer to the question, What will become of the individual if he "esteems others better than himself"? Who will take care of him if he does not look out for himself? The beautiful fact is, as a rule, that whoever does most for the common good of the home, whoever gives it most hearty service, is the one who gets most out of its life and enjoys it best. Whoever gives most love and demands the least in return is apt to be precisely the one whom every one loves most. In these high things the rule of getting seems to be, *not to try to get at all.* We shall have occasion later to trace this more fully.

A significant fact.

I have to protest here in passing against a common proverb that "love is blind." It does often seem blind. There are sweet and loving women who make themselves slaves to the selfishness of their husbands. There are sisters who give up their chance of education and happiness, and contrive to sacrifice other rights besides, in an unthinking sense of duty to their home. The fact is, that true love is intelligent. It sees the ends toward which it moves. Toward the real and larger welfare of its object it gives itself lavishly, but it has no right to give itself merely to minister to the ease, the selfishness, the complacency of another. This would be to harm the other. If true love is to keep the Golden Rule, it is not love to help our best friends to break the Golden Rule, and so to lose the prizes of life.

Love and intelligence.

I lay stress upon the working of the Golden Rule in the home, because here is a central point of departure from which to reach all the regions of human life. Thus the brothers of a family grow up and go into business. Having treated one another as brothers, and having found the Golden Rule to work as

What the world says of unbrotherly brothers.

long as they lived under the same roof, will they now change all this and take up the weapons of suspicion and unfriendliness toward one another? On the contrary, the whole world pronounces against brothers who are mean enough to hurt each other in business. The man who gets an advantage in trade to the loss of his own brother had better not let it be known "on the street."

The Golden Rule also marches out of the home and covers the realms of our friendships. What else does friendship mean than that friends treat each other after the fashion of brothers and sisters? The Golden Rule cements friendship as it binds the home. Perhaps you think that you can be a friend in social relations, but you need not be a friend in a bargain. The ordinary judgment of the world then proclaims you to be no true friend at all. Who will value your friendship for a moment, after you have tried to get the better of him in a trade? You are absolutely bound to observe the Golden Rule, at least toward your friends, if you want to keep them. You can no more afford to push and crowd them in business than you can venture to push and crowd them to the

In the realm of friendship.

wall at a social party. See then at once how the Golden Rule extends its sway.

The bond of friendship also takes up a great many almost superficial and conventional relations among men and women. There are large numbers of people who belong to lodges, orders, and brotherhoods. If a man is going to cheat or play a sharp trick in business, I suspect that he had better not touch the members of his own lodge of Masons or Odd Fellows. The Golden Rule will confront him some day in his lodge room with its eternal rebuke of hypocrisy. I am told that even on the Stock Exchange an irresistible code of honor compels the man who might be cruel and crafty in his dealings with "the lambs" outside, to be true and even generous toward his "brothers" of the Exchange.

Among various brotherhoods.

We come now to a singular anomaly, which has puzzled thousands of plain people and made endless scandal. It is the comparative failure of the Golden Rule among fellow Christians. You will hear men of large experience frequently say that they have found thoroughgoing friendship elsewhere, perhaps among

The Christian Church; an exception.

the members of their lodge, or in individuals who made no profession to belong to any church, while they have repeatedly suffered unfriendly treatment from their brother church members. The idea of Jesus about these things is as plain as day. You will know his friends, so he invariably teaches, by the fact that they love one another—that is, keep the Golden Rule. So far as he meant to establish a church, it was evidently to be the closest and the least conventional kind of brotherhood. It is hard enough to imagine that Jesus would ever have accepted as one of his friends—that is, as a Christian —a person who broke the Golden Rule toward outsiders, toward heathen, toward heretical Samaritans, much less who made his living by breaking it. But it is quite impossible to think of Jesus as admitting those to be Christians at all who break the Golden Rule toward their fellow Christians. "What!" we hear him say, "do you call yourselves by my name and yet dare to injure or cheat my friends, your own brothers and sisters? You have missed then the one idea for which I gave my life."

The anomaly of which I speak, however, is one of the very exceptions which at last

"proves the rule." In so far as a church at any time contains genuine persons, whenever there has been a true revival of the good life— among the Moravians, among the Quakers— when Wesley, Channing, General Booth, Phillips Brooks have preached the veritable gospel—you mark the tide of the new life absolutely by the working of the Golden Rule. You will find at every such point an actual enlargement of the real church of Christ. You find at least individuals who, having caught Jesus' idea of a life of friendly service, are honestly conducting their business on the beautiful lines of the Golden Rule. I maintain that this number is already considerable. The disappointment that we feel about the church is, that the spirit of the Golden Rule, which splendidly characterizes individual members, has not yet spread so as definitely to control the whole body.

The real church.

You may liken the region of business, and in many respects you must liken the church also, to a land of hills and plains, upon which the sun, just rising, has already begun to shine into the windows of the houses on the hilltops. Wherever brothers and kindly kinsfolk dwell,

The undoubted empire of the Golden Rule.

wherever friends live, wherever friendship, even in its semblance, is organized into societies and fellowships, wherever also the church idea is vital, the Golden Rule already is seen in its beneficent operation. It begins to look now as though those ought to be obliged to prove their case who deny that the Golden Rule is practicable.

III.

THE GOLDEN RULE AND NATURE.

It is often hastily assumed that nature is wholly against the Golden Rule. Selfishness, it is said, drives the wheels of the world. This is to leave out of sight an immense and impressive series of facts. It would be truer to say that the world is a vast parable of some deep law of coöperation. You see it at work in every crystal, you see it in the frost-work of your window-pane. You see it binding birds together in flocks, cattle in herds, bees in hives. You see it in its culmination in man. There is that, even in his animal nature, which binds him in social relations with his fellows. His better nature finds abiding contentment nowhere more than in friendly service. Jesus was the forerunner of a long line of those who have not only lived the good life, but have lived it with serene gladness.

A law of co-operation.

I wish to show how, in various important respects in the realm of business, the deeper

nature marches to support the Golden Rule. We will boldly begin with the profession of the minister, because I believe, so far from its being exceptional, it is typical of the trades and professions. He alone is truly a minister who stands to give the utmost possible service to his fellows. I maintain that the world is extremely appreciative of this kind of ministry. Why was the land full of praise for Dr. Parkhurst, or a little before for Dr. Brooks, except that men desire nothing so much as to see the working of the spirit of the Golden Rule?

What kind of ministers the world wants.

We pass, with the sense of scarcely a shade of difference of purpose, into the great department of education. You are about to choose a teacher for your kindergarten, a master for your high school, a president for your college. What kind of a candidate will you choose? Surely not any selfish or mercenary person. Your teachers, the educators of your children, must steer their lives by the Golden Rule. Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, or President Mark Hopkins, is the type of the man whom the world puts in the front rank among teachers.

The teachers.

What shall we say now of the physicians whom we delight to honor? We want science, skill, experience in our physician, but we want something more. We are afraid of a selfish and sordid man in the sick room. We want humanity, friendliness, a generous heart. In the best sense of the word, we want our physician to be a religious man, that is, a man of faith, hope, love. No one doubts that here is the ideal of the good physician.

The good physician.

Let us turn to the authors, the artists, the musicians, and see if the Golden Rule will hurt or help their art. I hold that art is truth, and the Golden Rule marches with truth. Art is beauty and the Golden Rule works toward the highest beauty. The great writers and poets have been eloquent in proportion as their hearts have been warm with humanity. Dante, Shakspeare, Milton, Browning, our own Lowell, Longfellow, and Whittier, have sung the praise of devotion and love. The great artists, Michael Angelo or Millet, have not dared, for cheap praise or for hire, to wrong the truth of their art. The great composers like Bach and Beethoven have put the human soul into their music. I do not claim that all

The great artists.

these men have been unselfish, but I claim that their best strength comes from their truth, their sincerity, their steadfastness, their sympathies. The masters never needed to be selfish, to push, or to scramble in order to win their renown.

The kind of artisans we all want.

Let us descend nearer to the great average life of mankind and see whether the Golden Rule will hurt or help a mechanic, a machinist, an engineer. We are told that the large employers cannot obtain enough skilled and trustworthy men. Other things being equal, the men who work by the standard of the Golden Rule actually command the highest wages in the market. Every one wants to be served by such men.

The farmers.

The same thing obviously holds good of the multitude of farmers. Here is a farmer who aims to do the least possible for his land, for his cattle and horses, for his neighbors, for his customers, and he wishes to get the most that he can for himself. Alongside of him is the man who gives honest and friendly measure to every one, who tends his land and loves his creatures. Which farmer, other things being equal, will succeed? The practice

of the Golden Rule will work every time.

Come now to the great army of labor, and see whether the Golden Rule, or selfishness stands in the way of the prosperity of the workers. Is it ever against the interests of the workingman, that he gives such faithful and friendly service as he would wish to have another render him? Does any one imagine, if the whole force of a factory were to act like Christians—in other words, were to do their work like true and brotherly men—that they would lose in wages, appreciation, contentment, happiness, or anything else?

Labor and the Golden Rule.

About the great mass of women's work we are perfectly sure. The larger part of it is done in households where, as we have seen, the essential condition of any degree of comfort is in the good temper of the inmates of the home. For all domestic situations there do not begin to be willing, cheerful, and friendly women to meet the demand. In other words, there is not a worker anywhere with whom the adoption of the Golden Rule does not signify a distinct, and often a very large, increase of value. The Golden Rule is founded in nature. It opens the

What the Golden Rule does for women's work.

flood-gates of new power, insight, and life.

We will make bold now to advance larger claims for the working of the Golden Rule.

What sort of men we want in politics.

We hold that it will work in that most difficult department of human life, politics. We have here conspicuous examples. Why does Washington stand at the head of our list of illustrious men? It is because he used his high place for the good of the people. In the Christian sense of the word, he was a great minister. Lincoln and Garfield were great for the same reason. Everywhere the country cries out for such men as these. Only these have any worthy memorial. Small and selfish men are blind not to see these things. What Jesus said begins already to be true, namely, that the meek—that is, those who do not seek their own ends, office, or emolument—"shall inherit the earth." Yes, shall hold the offices and wield the power! For thus the facts prophesy.

It is with these human relations as it is with boys in their games. It may be that the boys who cheat and break the rules of the game seem for a while to succeed. But the umpires are watching, and if there were no um-

The Eternal Umpire.

pires, the boys themselves have no real respect except for skill and fair play. So the Eternal Umpire presides over human affairs; no evil thing can prosper; no honest effort is unseen or lost.

IV.

THE GOLDEN RULE AND TRADE.

CAN we take one farther step and claim that the Golden Rule will work in the mercantile world? There are those who say that the ruling conceptions of trade are foreign to the genius of Christianity, or even of human brotherhood. Trade proceeds by competition. It buys in the cheapest market and sells in the dearest. It stands between the producer and consumer, and gets what it can out of each. As long as trade is a species of struggle, as long as the present mercantile and industrial system holds, men say, you cannot buy and sell by the Golden Rule. You must first alter the system of the world. If these things are so, no true and friendly man can remain in mercantile business. I cannot be bidden to do false or hurtful acts to my neighbors. I cannot send my sons to learn a business in which they must cheat and take mean advantage. Surely

What men say of the present system of trade.

there are other places of work to be found in the great world, where we may live without tripping up and crowding to the wall our weaker brothers, or scrambling disgracefully to get the highest seats at the table.

Let us first, however, see if the present mercantile system itself is wrong, or is it possible that the wrong is in the men who manage it? It is certain that a large part of all trade must run close to the lines of the Golden Rule. I mean that trade, upon the whole, is for the one net object of human service. It is for the good of all of us that merchants bring flour from Dakota and rice from the sea-islands. It is for good, and not mischief, that they fill their stores with costly merchandise. If I deal with them, it is because, in at least nine cases out of ten, I am measurably satisfied with my bargain.

What trade is for.

Moreover—a remarkable fact—in nearly every branch of trade I know certain dealers in whose friendly service I have solid confidence. In every city there are establishments upon the good faith of which one can rely. Whenever a business house has a generous reputation people like to go there to trade. Can it

Where men like to trade.

be unprofitable to the merchant that he makes his neighbors trust, respect, and love him? The Golden Rule tends to this precise end. On the contrary, he who violates the Golden Rule in his dealings rouses our suspicions, and either repels men's trade or sets them at work "to be even" with him.

The lines of justice and human service.

My point here is that the great bulk of mercantile transactions has to be reasonably near the lines of justice and of human service. The margin of dishonesty is somewhat narrow and dangerous. The Golden Rule, aiming at the utmost human welfare, is so deep in nature that it commands a sort of conformity, long before men have fairly caught its spirit. It is possible, if all the men in New York to-morrow adopted the Golden Rule that the figures of prices, values, and profits might not have to undergo very great change. It is likely that the services of few of us are worth to the world much more than we get. The adoption of the Golden Rule would lessen great sources of waste; it would increase the grand product out of which we all live; it would correct certain sad abuses and injustices; but its chief gain would be on the side of our humanity, in the quickened

sense of our brotherhood, lifting the ordinary relations of trade to the same level with the ministrations of the teacher, the physician, the poet and artist, the friend and the patriot.

What shall we say of this terrible old brute doctrine of competition? Is trade possible without it? I propose to translate this doctrine into higher terms. The competition which aggrieves us is that which seeks its gain at another's loss. You have this at its extreme in all kinds of gambling, whether in the lottery or in the stock and produce exchanges. You have it in the extortions of the ordinary pawnshop. In this kind of competition the weight of the effort is to get. But suppose the emphasis is changed, and the effort is to give, to accomplish a benefit, to do a service? Suppose that the aim in the school-room is not a prize, which only one can have, but the aim is the mark of excellence, which all may win if they please? What if the farmer tries for the largest product and highest quality of fruit, the manufacturer aims at turning out goods of standard perfection, the carpenter takes honest delight in the thoroughness of his workmanship, the merchant exerts himself to treat his customers handsomely? Here

The new competition.

is no longer a reckless and brutal struggle to crowd others to the wall. It is a friendly emulation, worthy of men. Its success is not at others' loss, but for the enrichment of all. This is precisely the application of the Golden Rule to trade as we have seen it applied in noble homes. We are surely very unfortunate in our business acquaintances if we have not actually seen those who thus successfully translated the competitive struggle into the highest human terms of honest and friendly service.

The law of "supply and demand" translated.

I am reminded of that stern law of trade, to "buy in the cheapest market and to sell in the dearest." Can this be translated into the terms of the Golden Rule? Let us see if there is anything intrinsically selfish in this "law of supply and demand." Men are now mostly selfish in using this law; let us show them how to use it with intelligent humanity. Where is the cheapest market for corn or cotton? It is where the supply is largest, and where presumably the farmer wants to exchange his product for money. And where is the dearest market? It is in the city or at the factory, where he will confer a favor who provides a supply. The Golden Rule surely

does not forbid a good man from bringing the supply to meet the need. What the Golden Rule requires is the attitude of a friend, who gives cheerfully as much as he can afford. The bargain that brings the needs of the buyer and seller together must aim to benefit both parties. The Golden Rule might not alter the terms of the bargain, but it would make men's eyes thoughtful to see the other's side in the bargain. Selfish men in a bargain are each suspiciously seeking to get advantage away from the other; friendly men seek to benefit each other. In each case the somewhat narrow margin, within which they adjust their prices, is the same. Thus when a farmer brings potatoes into the city, the buyer can hardly afford to give sixty cents a bushel. The farmer can hardly afford to sell for fifty cents. They agree upon fifty-five cents. If they are selfish men, they part, each grudging the other his advantage. If they are friendly men, they are happy in having shared a mutual benefit.

The Golden Rule in "the labor market."

Yes, some one replies, but the present industrial system puts human labor under this stern law. Will the Golden Rule let us buy labor in the cheapest market? Where is the cheapest

labor market? It is where unfortunate men are unemployed. There can be no wrong in employing them. The wrong is in being blind to their humanity. The wrong is in taking advantage of their necessity.

Things which we must not expect.

The Golden Rule is often expected to work a physical miracle, and make something out of nothing. If a thousand men, working grudgingly, only produce a thousand dollars' worth in a day, the Golden Rule cannot find means for the most generous employer to pay them each a dollar and a half. In other words, the Golden Rule cannot give a man more than the value of what he really produces.

The ills of the present industrial system and how their cure must come.

It must be admitted, nevertheless, that great wrongs are wrought under the present industrial system. It is easy to paint them in lurid colors. There are glaring inequalities. There are those whose immense luxuries, drawn from unjust monopolies, are borne at the common expense. I have tried to suggest that, deep down beneath the present system, below men's ordinary consciousness, the principle of the Golden Rule founded in nature is slowly at work, urging men into closer coöperation and bringing

hurtful methods to naught. The cure for the evils that distress us is certainly not in selfishness, standing aloof in envy and anger, or smashing the costly and delicate machinery of the world's industry. The cure is not in shirking or scamping one's work and cutting at the great aggregate product. The cure is not in snatching from the gains of others, or trying to live out of the public purse. The only cure is in owning the Golden Rule, even while others disown it, and in helping to make it work. As sure as this is God's world, it will and must work. As sure as we are God's children, we shall have no peace or satisfaction till we make it work. And if, as some think, a better system of human society is coming, it can only come as the expression of the will of a people whose hearts have been possessed with the spirit of the Golden Rule. Convert men to-day to live by this rule and labor troubles will cease, strikes will no more be heard of, exacting monopolies will disappear, the interest rate of money, rents, and taxes will decline, unused land will be opened to use, the aggregate product of all good things will be enlarged, and every one will have an ampler share, with leisure enough to enjoy it.

V.

THE GOLDEN RULE AS A VENTURE.

PERHAPS no one will be so skeptical as to deny the conclusion of the last chapter. Yes, men say, the Golden Rule will work if every one will keep it. It will work under favorable conditions, as, for instance, in dealings with our friends. The trouble is that the world is full of people who do not pretend to keep the Golden Rule, and against whose greed and selfishness we have to stand on guard.

A terrible "if."

I am overwhelmed at once with a chorus of objections and excuses. The merchant tells me frankly that he must sometimes break the Golden Rule, like other merchants, or he will starve. The manufacturer says that he cannot keep the Golden Rule while other manufacturers break it. If his workmen try to beat him out of his profits, he must in self-defense beat down their wages. There are men who cheat in their work. The mas-

Is honesty the best policy?

ter must fight them, if not with cheating, at least with fines, suspicions, espionage. The brutal spirit voices itself in the professions. We must get a living, men say, by doing as others do. We must mix a grain of humbug in our medicines, we must try to make the worse appear the better reason. You must keep on the side of your bread and butter, says the subtle tempter to the minister. You owe your first duty in this rude world to your family. Even kindly women are caught by the popular voice. It is no use, they say, to be generous to the girls in the kitchen. They do not thank us for our kindnesses. And the cooks and the maids answer back, We never get any thanks for keeping the Golden Rule. What a mercenary world it still is, when kind women grudge their kindness, unless they are paid in thanks!

In the face of these eager complaints I am bound to make certain concessions. I do not pretend that thorough workmanship, though cheapest and best in the end, is not somewhat costly at the start. Perhaps only the skilled engineer sees at first why so much work must be sunk out of sight for the foundations of the bridge. The engineer cannot always

The element of venture.

foresee in the new work exactly how costly it may prove, or what unexpected difficulties may need to be overcome. This fact of our human short-sightedness about great or new undertakings makes what we call the element of *venture*. It is a very interesting element, which gives zest to enterprise and color to hope. I must concede that the way of the Golden Rule, especially for one who begins to walk in it, holds this brave element of a venture. There are difficulties, there will be expense, there will be discouragements. I liken Jesus, with his clear sight of the laws of the good life, to the skilled engineer.

A concession about money-making.

I am inclined to concede at once that, if success is in making money, the man who keeps the Golden Rule will rarely make or keep so much money as that more cautious or less generous man, who only does "as the others do." We will grant that few millionaire fortunes can be made by the men of the Golden Rule.

About bad kinds of business.

We will concede, also, that there may be occasions where the Golden Rule would drive a man out of his present business, as Zacchæus was probably driven out of his publican's office. What can a true man do, if he dis-

covers that his business is of no real use to human society? And there are such kinds of business! What can a true man do, if the customs of his trade command him to hush his conscience, or to harden his heart, as the slave trade did, as the liquor trade largely does now? What can he do, if the kind of competition in which he is involved urges him to use the methods of the sweat-shop against his working people? What can he do, if he wakes up to find himself one of the tools of a monstrous monopoly?

About high salaries.

The Golden Rule will also sometimes dictate a reduction of salary or income. It seems obvious, if the wages of employees in a mill must be cut down, that the higher officers ought cheerfully to accept a like reduction of their salaries and the stockholders to receive a smaller dividend. In hard times the minister must willingly suffer losses with his people.

The risk of unpopularity.

It is evident that thorough obedience to the Golden Rule will not always be popular. The rule will require us to do more than others do, to move in advance of the great body of men in our trade or profession. The

weapons of strife and suspicion are largely in vogue. The manufacturer who ventures to trust the friendly methods of the Golden Rule may be called a "crank." The workman who tries to treat his employer as he would wish to be treated will risk unpopularity among his mates. We may have confidence that the Golden Rule will work eventual prosperity, as the men who began the strife against slavery trusted in the triumph of liberty. But the world is still shy of changing its barbarous habits, and we who believe in the Golden Rule must make up our minds, like all pioneers, to be for a while in the minority. The Great Engineer's plan will doubtless be cheapest and best, but it is only the few at first who willingly face his careful figures. Did he ever promise that those who follow him should suffer no disappointment?

Nevertheless, it is safe to do right.

We come to the practical question which the timid will always be asking: Shall we be sure of a living if we take this magnificent venture? Will not our families suffer? Can we educate our children on the income that the Golden Rule will leave us? It is evident that from the time of Jesus down to our own

Civil War, the way of the Golden Rule has often led to poverty, imprisonment, and death. Nevertheless, the sufferings of the martyrs have already purchased such an advance in humanity that no one who reads these words is likely really to starve for his devotion to duty! Neither do I believe that the children of those who prefer to remain poor rather than to do unrighteous things, will suffer in all that makes true education, in comparison with the children of him who has made his money by craft, the wrecking of railroads, the bribing of legislators. As I shall presently show, education is wrong that makes children think that the values of life are in eating and drinking, or lets them forget the eternal laws that bind society.

I might go farther and urge again, what I have shown in a previous chapter, that in many practical directions "godliness" — that is, righteousness, truth, friendliness—has "promise of the life that now is." All things go to show that human progress moves in this direction.

The advantage of doing right.

I do not care, however, to prove in advance that the Golden Rule will always work to one's immediate material advantage. The

great new investments of each age emerge out of a cloud of some uncertainty. All the men and women who have ever done memorable things, or lived the noble lives whose memories we are proud to inherit, have taken ventures for truth, justice, liberty, love, humanity. Our religion itself is such a glorious venture. You can make no demonstration of its truth in advance that will satisfy a coward or an egotist. It rests, indeed, on great and ever-increasingly obvious facts of the moral universe. To the trained engineer's eye its conclusions are irresistible. But to each individual the entrance upon it remains an act of faith. To do merely what is safe, what pays, what gives immediate satisfaction, requires no faith nor courage, nor even intelligence. To do the new and higher thing, the lines of which run into the infinite distance, is ever the call of religion. Faith predicts that it will be well, but the man has to wait to see. This is the condition of his finiteness. It is only at his highest moments, bought by obedience to the heavenly visions, that he catches glimpses of the eternal certitudes.

Faith and certainty.

VI.

WHAT MAKES SUCCESS.

I HASTEN to clear up a certain doubtful ground. The doubt is as to what makes human success. It is commonly assumed that success is measured by what one gets. It is in amassing means, money, goods. It is in luxurious living; it is in winning position and office; it is in being indulged, served, praised. It is no wonder that children think so. We have seen that it is not so in the home. The grown man soon finds that all kinds of success in getting fail to bring satisfaction. The larger the nature or size of the personality the more signal the man's failure. It is here that Jesus' radical teaching proves to be truth, not for another world, but for this world. Jesus never says that getting is of no use, but he lays the emphasis on the other and neglected side of life. The law of the individual life, says he, is to give rather than to get. The business of the vein or the artery is to

Getting and giving.

pour the blood through, to distribute nourishment for the body. Thus the artery gets its own growth ; the more it gives the more it shall have. In short, the law of its getting is to give. So with each individual man. Does he wish to be large, rich, full? Let him not then seek for himself to be ministered unto, but let him become the largest possible minister to the life of mankind. The world does not so much exist for him as he exists for the world. Let him do his best for the world, and let him not doubt that the Lord of the world will thus do the best for him.

The law of life.

It is interesting to observe that the bodily health responds at once to this deeper moral condition. There is nothing so rasping to the health as all kinds of selfish anxiety. Jealousy, envy, suspicion, as well as self-indulgence, sap the springs of life and set ajar the nervous balance. It is not work that hurts, so much as the frustration of work that has no worthy aim. This waste of life, this nervous strain is saved, when we accept the law that makes us simply ministers of the great Good-Will. We are now under orders of conscience, of truth, of love. We hold all that we possess in trust. We have only to do what the

Good-Will bids. Further care we have none. Friction and worriment are reduced to a minimum. Our lives have become parallel with the motion of the life forces of the universe.

Jesus' own life was the exemplification of this principle. His life was large, rich, full. Who saw more of the beauty of this world? Who rejoiced more in the love of his friends? Who had a more joyous hope to buoy up his heart, that all would be well? Who in his time was better educated than this carpenter's son, who saw the deeper, though quite simple, meanings of existence? If the Golden Rule worked his death a little earlier than Herod's or Pilate's, it first gave him the sweetest enjoyment of life that man had ever possessed.

Wherein Jesus succeeded.

The truth is, that real life is in the activity of every part and function that makes the whole man. It is as though a stream of divine health were coursing through one; the nerves tingle with zest; the mind is quick; the heart is warm; faith treads its brave ventures with firm foot. The man is at his full height when, like Jesus, body and mind give them-

The complete manhood.

selves with free abandon to carry the messages and do the service of love.

The appeal to facts.

We are already accumulating a memorable array of instances to show that Jesus' idea of success is simply the normal rule, to which all men who want real life must conform. Who that has heard of General Armstrong's work for the blacks at Hampton, or Mr. Brace's work for the neglected children of New York, can doubt that the most absolute consecration to the spirit of the Golden Rule brought these men the highest possible joy. Others might have deemed their lives a sacrifice upon the altar of a stern duty. They would have replied that such persons did not know what life was. We are poor if we do not number among our friends those who have made similar trial of the new life, to which the Golden Rule is the portal. If in any real sense this is God's world and we are his children, the Golden Rule is the only conceivable way through which the divine life can flow into the soul. Break the rule and you check the flow of the life. Surely, then, it is false education that teaches however many other things, but fails to teach the eternal rule, whereby life is renewed and made to grow rich.

VII.

THE GOLDEN RULE IN ORGANIZATION.

I HAVE so far assumed that it was only necessary to persuade individuals to trust Jesus' teaching, and like him to accept the Golden Rule as the law of their life. Neither can I doubt that it is with the individual in every case that our rule must first win its way. But the complicated conditions of our modern life offer many grave difficulties. Not only the individual workman, but the employer also is often caught in the coil of a vast industrial system, from which he does not know how to escape. What can he do alone, though with the attitude of the Golden Rule, in the face of the pitiless competition of the unscrupulous, or of a labor market crowded with emigrants, scrambling for the lowest American wages?

The weakness of the individual.

Moreover, the whole tendency of civilization is toward closer and vaster forms of combination. We have already traced a law, that

the individual gets the most and best for himself, as he learns to give the utmost to others. Coöperation is the mode by which the activity of all is brought to effectiveness. The growth in combination is really a growth in humanity. But the older barbarous ideas still largely survive. The great combinations are organized to fight, and not yet fairly to serve, or they serve by the working of the deeper law, in spite of the selfish purpose of the men who direct them. The employers combine in self-defense and establish corporations and trusts. Sometimes they seem to unite out of sheer selfishness. The workingmen of different trades combine likewise into unions, and even try to federate their unions together and to mass all the labor of a nation into an industrial army. They propose to keep even with the capitalist and to wrest from him a fairer share of the joint product. They propose to legislate against his legislation and to alter the laws. Some promise to go further and to inaugurate a new system of society.

The trend of modern civilization.

There does not seem to be much of the Golden Rule in these great combinations. There is much evident bitterness. It is strife

of the selfish against the selfish. Nevertheless, beneath the surface a new principle slowly makes headway. Selfishness, like injustice, is a disintegrating force. It has to unload somewhat of its weight in order to enter into any combination. At least within its own group or union it must keep the form of the Golden Rule or go down. Even in the most dangerous combination of greedy capital, there is deference to the growing public opinion of the nation and a fear of the laws through which this public opinion will surely shatter any conspiracy of the few against the good of the many.

How combinations work.

Especially in the labor unions the Golden Rule binds the members among themselves with an ever-deepening hold. Men and women are seen sacrificing their immediate and personal interests, losing wages and risking starvation, for what they deem the good of their brotherhood. Whether they are always wise or not, the spirit is often precisely the same as that which gave the early Christian Church its headway in the teeth of persecution.

What holds labor unions together.

There is, however, a class of combinations

to-day such as the world never before saw which are almost purely the outgrowth of the Golden Rule. They are the various friendly, philanthropic, educational, patriotic, humane, and missionary organizations. Individuals possessed with the purpose of the Golden Rule join hands simply to give of their labor or their means to cure human evils and relieve needs. Thus the various temperance societies stand for the desire of a multitude of people to forego personal indulgence for the sake of the greater good. The movements for purer government, such as the effort for civil service reform, represent the will of individuals like the distinguished editor, George William Curtis, to devote themselves to public service.

A new kind of combinations.

We have the clue to understand how the spirit of the Golden Rule is likely to work relief from the great and threatening efforts of organized selfishness. We do not need first to convert all men to the principle of the Golden Rule. We shall meet bad organizations with better and stronger ones. In some instances we shall capture the old organizations with the new temper. The men of the Golden Rule in a mercantile corporation will make

How the good will overcome the bad.

their joint influence felt to change injurious methods, to do justice toward employees, to alter a selfish attitude to a friendly one. The men of the Golden Rule in a labor union will unite to require the use of only righteous means to right their wrongs. They will insist that employers and capitalists are also men like themselves. There will be new organizations directly governed by the Golden Rule. If the competition of the reckless grinds downwards, if the land laws that fitted a pioneer age cease to fit our crowded population and make worse inequalities, if wealth concentrated in a few hands means degradation of the people, the Golden Rule will not only bind individuals to protest against the evil, but to band themselves together and to discover means to change the evil to good.

The binding power of friendliness.

It must be remembered that there is no binding power in organization so great as the Golden Rule. While selfishness with its jealousies splits men apart, friendliness unites them. A few men bound with this kind of tie, like the Macedonian phalanx, will work wonders. All the great reforms are a witness of the superb power of the devoted few. The success of the Golden Rule in organization

on a large scale has not yet even been tried.

Moreover, the characteristic method of the Golden Rule is profound, subtle, and marvelously effective. It does not fight evil with evil, hatred with hatred, wrong by doing an opposite wrong. It fights evil with good, by persuasion, by fairness, by good temper, by expecting the best of men instead of their worst. As in the story of the traveler's cloak, it does not, like the north wind, drive the man to fold himself more closely about, but it acts like the genial sun to make him take off the cloak of his selfishness. This method is yet quite new in the world. But those who have experimented and watched its working look for developments in it as great and rapid as we already have seen in the material world by the application of the new powers of steam and electricity.

The method of Jesus.

We rise to a better conception of the meaning and office of the church. Grant that the true church is made up of men and women who unite to express "the faith of Jesus Christ." And what is the faith of Jesus? Jesus' faith surely was, that this is not the devil's world, not a material world, not an agnostic

The new office of the church.

world of which man can know nothing, but it is God's world. Jesus' faith was in the Golden Rule, that it would work, that whoever would trust it the Eternal Love would support. Jesus sealed this intensely practical faith with his life and his death. Those who looked on cried out, "We told you so. The Golden Rule is brought to naught." On the contrary, Jesus' death proved to usher in the dawn of a new era of human progress. We have henceforward the key to understand history. All history is the constant march of the forces that bring the Golden Rule to triumph, the defeat of every short-lived scheme, policy, industrial system, or political government that thwarts the growing good of man.

The church as it has been and the church as it must be.

Whatever significance the church has had in the past has been in the fact that underneath its gigantic establishments has been hidden the vital germ of this spirit of brotherhood. But hitherto the good spirit has been mainly in the hearts of individuals. The organization has rarely expressed the Christian spirit, but it has expressed almost everything else, men's ambition, their avarice, their superstitions, their speculations. The church

has never tried to see what it could do as an organized effort to bring the Golden Rule into effect, to spread its sway, to persuade men to adopt it.

To-day the world is getting ready to judge the church by this test and no other. Does the church make men friends? Do the men and women of the church conduct their business, their farms, shops, railroads, and factories in the spirit of friendliness, that is, in the spirit of Christ? Do they bring up their children to take the Golden Rule as the law of their lives? Is this the end of their Sunday-school training, and is that Sunday-school alone thought to be a success which commits its youth to the brave and noble ventures of the Golden Rule? In short, does the church head the organized forward movement of mankind toward a Christian civilization?

A new and noble test.

How can we believe in God unless we keep the chief law of his kingdom? The Great Engineer shows us the plan of the bridge that binds earth and heaven together. He lays down the law of the bridge. He trusts the weight of his life to it. Shall we dare to call ourselves Christians and not do the same?

What it is to be a Christian.

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